Economic Conditions,-General-1938.

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Report To The President On The Economic Conditions In The South

HEALTH

For years evidence has been piling up that food, clothing, and housing influence not only the sickness rate and death rate, but even the height and weight of school children. In the South, where family incomes are exceptionally low, the sickness and death rates are unusually high. Wage differentials become in fact differentials in health and life; poor health, in turn, affects wages.

The low-income belt of the South is a belt of sickness, misery, and unnecessary death. Its large proportion of low-income citizens are more subject to disease than the people of any similar area. The climate cannot be blamed—the South is as healthful as any section for those who have the necessary care, diet, and freedom from occupational disease.

Several years ago the United States Public Health Service conducted syphilis-control demonstrations in selected rural areas in the South. These studies revealed a much higher ratio of syphilis among Negroes than among whites, but showed further that this higher ratio was not due to physical differences between the races. It was found to be due to the greater poverty and lower living conditions of the Negroes. Similar studies of such diseases have shown that individual health cannot be separated from the health of the community as a whole.

The presence of malaria, which infects annually more than 2,000,000 people, is estimated to have reduced the industrial output of the South one-third. One of the most striking examples of the effect of malaria on industry was revealed by the Public Health Service in studies among employees of a cotton mill in eastern North Carolina. Previous to the attempt to control malaria, the records of the mill one month showed 66 looms were idle as a result of ill-health. After completion of control work, no looms were idle for that reason. Before control work, 238,046 pounds of cloth were manufactured in one month. After completion of the work production rose to 316,804 pounds in one month—an increase of 33 1-2 percent. In reports obtained in 1935 from 9 lumber companies, owning 14 sawmill villages in 5 southern States, there was agreement that malaria was an important and increasing problem among the employees. During the year 6 percent of hospital admissions, 16.4 percent of physician calls and 19.7 percent of dispensary drugs were for malaria. The average number of days off duty per case of malaria was 9, while days in the hospital for the same cause were 5. Ten railroads in the South listed malaria as an economic problem and a costly liability. Four utility companies had full-time mosquito-fighting crews at work during the year. The average case admitted to the company hospital lasted 3 days and the average number of days off duty because of malaria was 11. Each case of malaria was said to cost the company $40.

If we attempt to place a monetary value on malaria by accepting the figures of $10,000 as the value of an average life and using the death rate of 3.943 for malaria reported by the census for 1936, the annual cost of deaths from this disease is $39,500,000. To this figure could be added the cost of illness, including days of work lost.

The health-protection facilities of the South are limited. For example, there are only one-third as many doctors per capita in South Carolina as there are in California. The South is deficient in hospitals and clinics, as well as in health workers. Many counties have no facilities at all.

The South has only begun to look into its pressing industrial hygiene problems, although it has 26 percent of the male mine workers in the United States and 14 percent of the male factory workers. These are the workers with which modern industrial health protection is most concerned.

The experience as to pneumonia and tuberculosis among employees of the Tennessee Coal Iron and Railroad Co., and their dependents during the 11-year period from 1925 to 1935 gives an indication of health conditions among miners in the south. The situation generally is probably worse than shown by the figures for this company, whose workers have relatively better protection against disease. For this period the number under observation averaged slightly more than 77,000 persons. There were 3,780 cases of pneumonia, of which 739 terminated fatally. This resulted in an average frequency per 1,000 of aproximately 4.9 pneumonia cases per year among surface workers, 4.7 among coal miners, and 10.6 among ore miners. The rate of 4.2 for dependents included also the pneumonia of childhood and infancy. A fatality rate of 30.7 deaths per 1,000 cases of pneumonia was found among surface workers, a rate of 26.8 among coal miners and 24.8 among ore miners. Deaths from tuberculosis occurred at an annual rate of 1.467 per thousand workers among coal miners, 1.232 among ore miners, and 0.566 among surface workers.

Prior to 1936 only one State in the South gave consideration to industrial hygiene. Today with the aid of Social Security funds, seven additional States have industrial hygiene units, and approximately 7,000,000 of the 10,000,000 gainful workers are receiving some type of industrial hygiene service. However, these industrial-hygiene units have started their programs only recently, and it will be some time before adequate health services will be available. The funds now being spent for this activity in the eight States which have industrial-hygiene services do not meet the problem of protecting and improving the health of these workers. Approximately $100,000 is now being budgeted for this work, although it is known that the economic loss due to industrial injuries and illnesses among these workers is hundreds of millions of dollars.

Reports of one of the largest life-insurance companies show that more people in the southern area than elsewhere die without medical aid. The same company reported in a recent year a rise of 7.3 percent in the death rate in the nine South Atlantic States, though in no other region had the death rate risen above 4.8 percent, and in some sections it had declined.

The scourge of pellagra, that affects the South almost exclusively, is a disease chiefly due to inadequate diet; it responds to rather simple preventive measures, including suitable nourishing food. Even in southern cities from 60 to 88 percent of the families of low incomes are spending for food less than enough to purchase an adequate diet.

SAYS RACE'S STATUS MARS SOUTH'S AVERAGE

Birmingham, Ala.—(SNS)—Terming the South "the No. 1 Economic Hope," Fitzgerald Hall, president of the Southern States Industrial Council, said in effect in an article in the News-Age Herald Sunday that the Negro is at the bottom of much of the economic disturbance in this region.

He attacked the "Report on the Economic Conditions of the South" for its "generalities, ambiguities and misleading statements."

Said Mr. Hall in part:

"1. For example, the study is replete with illustrations placing the South in the lower brackets in practically all measures of economic condition, but nowhere is there specific mention made of the depression influence, in dealing in averages, of the fact that 29 per cent of its population is colored. The report does not point out that the standard of living and the income of Negroes everywhere in the United States, in general, is lower than that of the white population nor does it say that with such a large concentration of Negroes in the South average figures for that section are obviously greatly affected thereby.

Why were not the facts brought out which were made available in recent studies of consumer purchases by the United States Department of Agriculture, giving a comparison of family income by occupations in 140 villages in the United States? In these studies it was found that the median annual income of non-relief white familes was more in the Southwest than in most other sections of the country. In 15 Georgia and South Carolina villages the annual income was $1,309, in 18 North Carolina and Mississippi villages it was $1,764 as compared with $1,477 for 14 Vermont and Massachusetts villages; $1,075 for 19 Illinois and Iowa villages, $1,167 for 13 villages in Pennsylvania and Ohio, and $1,208 for 14 villages in Michigan and Wisconsin.

"However, if Negro familes were included, the average for Southern villages would be greatly depressed, as compared with the average income in villages that have little or no Negro population. The question might be asked, Why does not the South do something about raising the standards for the Negroes? That problem is nation-wide, for the relative economic position of the race is the same in every section of the country, but is simply more noticeable in the South, because of its predominance here That all should cooperate to alleviate the situation is obvious."

WHAT'S THE MATTER WITH THE SOUTH?

Editor of The Advertiser:

I've about burnt up my cob pipe thinking over the Report on Economic Conditions Of The South that George Grant or Lister Hill sent me. Seems to me we ain't so much the number one economic problem as we are our own mental problem.

It may be fair to interpret "conditions" like us parents do when a pupil brings home his report card with a condition on it, only he usually has only one whereas we got them plural.

In the smoke of my corn cob I see seven deadly sins the matter with the South. First, we got a bad environmental inheritance. Like Andrew H. Brown, all of us wants to be "presidunt." We come from the kind of folks who want the other feller to do the work while we do the "presidunting," and that won't work.

Second, we got perpetual motion in the flow of our money to the North for everything — meat, clothes, cars, radios, even tobacco. I'm even guilty, a shipping my pecans from Nut Hill to Funston in St. Louis or Gridley-Maxon in Chicago, then buying 'em back in candy and cakes. We're making the candy maker, the sheller and the tasty bar baker rich while we pay profits and freight both ways. Too, we let our best brains erode northward that ought to be finding ways of manufacturing the pecans and our other resources into goods to bring some money this way.

Then we've let the nigger not only do our work but our thinking too— using "nigger" in the sense of all of us workers. We've been so busy arguing politics we ain't had time to work or think.

Fourth, we got so much dignity we're afraid to start a little manufacturing plant for fear some neighbor'll say we're crazy. Not only are we fear ridden, but we have no example of universal initiative at hand to spur us on. A horse laugh would kill us.

Next, till now we didn't know what we had. We're jest ignunt like eighty-odd year old Lord Roseberry when he said to an aged friend: "We've both been dead twenty years but don't know it." But we know, since our committee of Southern neighbors has told us. Maybe that'll wake us up, if anything will.

Sixth, we got a crick in our necks looking over our shoulder to the Washington Santa Claus. Even our good governor is about to git paralysis of the palm. He's held it out enough to Ickes and Hopkins to. No wonder us cracker-box viewers-with-alarm expect the holidays to last!

And, seventh, we're trying to fit ourselves to northern standards, in styles, in business, in education, even in food We set our tables with farm produce grown in the north more than we do with our own. We're making progress, but so did the turtle. If we'd ketch some of the northern hustle, it might cure what ails us.

If all the Report says of us is true, we're like a neighbor of mine here in the sand hills of Ramer who drives a Fode pick-up. One day he was hustling home from a post office conference and got stuck in a bog. When he jumped down and run around to the back to see what he could unload so he could get out, he saw he was empty. "Thar, now," he said, scratching his bald spot. "Stuck ergin an' nothin' to unload!"

That's us in the South. We ain't put in nothing 'cept cotton and peanuts to unload. We got all the rest, timber, iron, clays, Dr. Carver's discoveries over at Tuskegee—say, that's a real school!—folks, climate, soil, grass, ever'thing, 'cept the spark to git 'em going. Tell us how to git that, please suh!

Yours, for the spark,

Ramer, Ala., Nov. 21 PEAH DUBBUE.